

MIND-BODY HEALTH

Janice Chow, MS, RD (Founder & Dietitian of The Mindful Chow)



Our mind and body are tightly connected. How we think, how we feel and what constitutes our beliefs and lived experiences play a significant role in our physical health. Having a general well being and good relationship with food and physical activities also affect our mental health.

For centuries, AA & NH/PI communities have long practiced the concepts of mind-body connection in traditional and folk medicine. Examples are Traditional Chinese Medicine in China, Ayurvedic Medicine in India and Native healing practices in Hawai'i. Western medicine is gradually recognizing the importance of having a holistic view of health, including mind and body as a whole.

An example of mind-body connection is how our body handles stress. Stress can come from different sources, such as feeling anxious before a job interview, having an illness or injury, experiencing abuse or having financial issues.

When we feel stressed, our bodies react to it as if we are ready to “fight” or gear up enough energy to “escape” - this is called the fight-or-flight response. Our bodies release hormones that will increase heart rate, blood pressure and blood sugar, and make our muscles tense up. This stress reaction is useful if we need to deal with immediate danger!

But, if we constantly feel stressed, our natural fight-or-flight response would last too long. Our blood pressure and blood sugar level may continue to stay high, which could contribute to uncontrolled blood pressure and blood sugar. Also, long-term stress can cause changes in mood, depression, anxiety and heightened anger.

How do we cultivate mind-body health? What strategies can we use?

1. Seek mental health support from a culturally-competent therapist.
2. Engage in mindfulness practices, such as meditation, prayers and deep breathing.
3. Eat consistent meals to ensure having enough energy throughout the day.
4. Choose gentle movements (yoga, stretching, taichi), or just rest if you want!
5. Connect with traditional AA & NH/PI healing practices, such as acupuncture, massage and herbal regimen (as long as they don't counter interact with your current medications).